United Nations

Press Release

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council holds further consultations on situation between Iraq and Kuwait.

- Secretary-General repeats appeal to Members of United Nations and of specialized agencies for voluntary contributions to finance United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus.

- Leaders of major United Nations humanitarian agencies to meet in New York on Thursday to discuss relief needs of countries affected by Gulf war.

- International Committee of Red Cross appeals again on behalf of civilian and military victims of war and calls on parties to fully respect and implement provisions of international humanitarian law.

- Outer Space Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee discusses use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

- Global conference at Food and Agriculture Organization to discuss food standards and chemicals in food and food trade.

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The Security Council held further consultations this afternoon on the situation in the Gulf.

Meanwhile, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar has commented on the beginning of the ground war in the Persian Gulf.

Asked by correspondents this morning on arriving at Headquarters how he felt about the allied forces going into Iraqi territory, the Secretary-General replied that it appeared to be "indispensable in order to obtain the objective which is exclusively to liberate Kuwait".

Mr. Perez de Cuellar was also asked if he thought the allied forces were using resolution 678 (1990) -- the Security Council's decision to set the

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15 January deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait -- not only to liberate Kuwait but to overthrow President Saddam Hussein. In reply, the Secretary-General said he had never heard anybody admit that one of the objectives was to topple the Saddam Hussein Government. He added that there was no mandate for such a goal in the United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Perez de Cuellar further said that history showed that hostilities and diplomacy could live together and that he hoped that there was still a possibility to minimize loss of life.

In a related development, the Secretary-General's Spokesman said today, in reply to a question, that Mr. Perez de Cuellar had received a letter from the Iraqi delegation addressed to the Security Council, which was now being translated from Arabic. The Spokesman said he believed the letter did not request "any specific action", and added that it came from the Iraqi President.

As threats of a ground war in the Persian Gulf intensified, the Security Council met in a closed formal meeting on Saturday, 23 February, to debate the situation between Iraq and Kuwait. At the end of the meeting, the Secretary-General said in a statement that the Council was meeting at a crucial hour. Openings towards the resolution of the conflict had been clearly revealed during the last two days, he said, and it would be a tragic in the extreme if the opportunities that had been created were to be lost. The Secretary-General said that since the beginning of the crisis there had been devastation on a vast scale and the consequences to a vital and most strategic part of the world were still "literally incalculable".

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The Secretary-General has appealed to all Member countries of the United Nations member and its specialized agencies for voluntary contributions for the financing of the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Mr. Perez de Cuellar has repeatedly expressed his concern about the financial situation of the Force.

In a letter addressed to the Member countries, the Secretary-General said that it was "unfair" that the troop-contributing countries should absorb the shortfall of UNFICYP, which as of the end of January was estimated at $165 million.

As a result, he said, the United Nations, which shares a third of the total cost of the Force, had been able to meet the claims of troop-contributing countries only up to December 1980; it was clear that "the highly unsatisfactory situation must not be allowed to continue".

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Leaders of major United Nations humanitarian agencies are due to meet in New York on Thursday to discuss relief needs of countries affected by the Gulf war.

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Convened by the Secretary-General, the meeting will have on its agenda a report from a joint mission of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which recently took medical supplies for distribution to people in affected areas. The senior WHO official who visited Baghdad, Dr. Ali Khogali, returned to Geneva on Saturday with other members of his team. He told journalists that the health and nutrition officials travelled freely in Baghdad and visited hospitals and health centres. They handed over enough medical supplies to meet the needs of more than 2 million mothers and children for three months. He said that the main problem at the present was water and sanitation.

The mission did not visit Kuwait. WHO officials said that an assessment mission would probably be sent there when circumstances permitted.

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has informed the United Nations that it has launched another appeal on behalf of civilian and military victims of the war. It called on all parties to fully respect and implement the provisions of international humanitarian law. It said that wounded, sick or shipwrecked soldiers from all sides must be collected, respected and protected, and that soldiers who surrendered must be spared. They should be evacuated from the front lines, removed from combat zones and taken to a place where their security could be guaranteed, the Red Cross said.

Parties to the conflict must now take steps to protect civilians, including the evacuation of non-combatants from war zones, especially wounded and sick children and the elderly, and to allow the free passage of essential supplies. The ICRC has urged all parties to conclude agreements which would establish neutralized zones.

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During the past week, the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has been discussing international efforts in space research and satellite programmes.

This morning the Committee began a debate of the use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

For the Soviet Union, Boris Khabirov said the use of the most modern technology should in no way harm human life or damage the environment. He told the Sub-Committee that in May last year, the Soviet Union had held an international conference on nuclear power in outer space. The Conference documentation had made clear the need for international co-operation in the use of nuclear power sources in space vehicles.

For India, M.G. Chandrasekhar, said it was important to achieve at least a minimum set of international principles and guidelines, which concerned the safety of human population, preservation of the environment and conduct of activities in outer space, which was the common heritage of humankind.

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An international conference at the headquarters in Rome of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) next month will consider measures ensuring safer food and removing obstacles hindering the $200 billion world food trade.

The FAO announced today that the conference on food standards, chemicals in food and food trade, to be held from 18 to 27 March, would be jointly organized by FAO and WHO, in co-operation with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma, in a comment on the conference, underscored its importance, "especially coming at a time of increasing concern for food safety, and when contamination in food exports is costing developing countries millions in foreign currency, so desperately required for overall national development".

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